

13 Tevet 5780
January 10, 2020

Parashat Vayechi

We have learned that there are two types of spaces or breaks in a ספר תורה.* The first is called a פתוחה and is marked in many חומשים by a big letter פ. This means that in the ספר תורה, it is like a new paragraph where the end of a line is left blank and the writing continues on the following line. The second kind of space is called a סתומה and is marked in many חומשים by a big letter ס. This means that in the ספר תורה, there is a large blank space in the middle of the line.

The תורה has these two types of spaces to show that there is a change of subject or a new idea being discussed. Every פרשת השבוע begins after either a פתוחה or a סתומה -- that is every פרשה except for ויחי. Why is ויחי different?

רש"י answers that once יצחק אבינו died, the eyes and hearts of בני ישראל were "closed" because of the slavery. Since יצחק died in ויחי, the פרשה symbolically begins by being "closed", without any space or breathing room, to represent how בני ישראל felt as a result of יצחק's death.

There is only one problem with this explanation. The slavery didn't begin when יצחק died. In fact, it didn't begin for more than 50 years until next week's פרשת שמות. So what does רש"י mean?

The אבן עזר answers that as long as יצחק אבינו was alive, בני ישראל were connected to him and his ways of אמת (truth) and תורה. When he died, although they were physically free, they began to become spiritually enslaved in מצרים. They began to think like מצרים and not like children of יצחק. We face the same challenge today as well -- to think and act like children of יצחק. The תורה is our guide at all times. חֲזַק חֲזַק וְתַמְזִק!

*There is really a third kind of break as well. At the end of ספר בראשית, ספר שמות, ספר ויקרא, and ספר באר ויקרא there are several blank lines in the ספר תורה.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Roth